DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 458 802 FL 026 952

AUTHOR	Pardi, Marco M.
TITLE	Focus Groups with Linguistically Marginalized Populations.
PUB DATE	2001-01-00
NOTE	25p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	American Indians; Black Dialects; Blacks; Cultural Education; *English (Second Language); Ethnic Groups; *Focus Groups; Immigrants; Interviews; *Language Minorities; Limited English Speaking; Mexican Americans; Nonstandard Dialects; *Public Health; Qualitative Research
IDENTIFIERS	African Americans

ABSTRACT

The focus group method has rapidly gained credibility among researchers in many fields, including public health researchers. The increased use of focus groups by public health researchers has underscored the demonstrable need for the capacity to apply this method of research among populations with limited abilities in or cultural resistance to conversing in Standard American English (SAE). This paper addresses the issues fundamental to the use of the focus group method among such populations. It discusses the rationale, methodology, and interpretation of focus group research among nonnative English speaking populations and the U.S.-born populations inhibited by poor education or differential linguistic patters. The paper employs research examples looking at American Indian, Mexican and Central American immigrants using several dialects of New World Spanish, low-income African Americans, and aging Appalachian coal miners. The current scarcity of linguistically and culturally competent group moderators or facilitators makes research in this area difficult, as do methodological issues including recruitment, intra-group social ranking, and outcome interpretation. It is demonstrated that valid focus group research with linguistically marginalized groups is possible, but the difficulties are many. (KFT)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 458 802

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Marco M. Pardi

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Key words: Rationale; methodology; interpretation

by Marco M. Pardi

ABSTRACT: Focus Groups With Linguistically Marginalized Populations

Survey based quantitative research often excludes or limits participation by groups which are less able to communicate in Standard American English (SAE). Presenter will clarify nature, rationale, methodology, and interpretation of focus group research among Non-English speaking populations and U.S. native populations inhibited by poor education or differential linguistic patterns.

Employing research examples with Native Americans, Mexican and Central American immigrants using several dialects of New World Spanish, low income African-Americans, and aging Appalachian coal miners, presentation addresses:
1. Qualitative nature of focus group based research;
2. Cultural factors shaping event timing, logistics, and conduct;
3. Participant recruitment Special Issues;
4. Linguistic translation;
5. Outcome interpretation.

Focus group based research has grown exponentially, with application largely confined to native speakers of SAE. Partly impeded by scarcity of linguistically/culturally competent group moderators, research with ethnic/linguistic groups is also confounded by methodological issues including recruitment, intra-group social ranking, and outcome interpretation. Targeted preparation, including Key Informants/advisors, and pre-screening - along with back translation - of the discussion guide, surmounts such obstacles. Also, a culturally fluent transcription/translation service is essential.

The research examples demonstrate that focus group methodology with linguistically marginalized groups is possible. These findings call for greater attention to the felt needs of ethnic/cultural community members, beyond default "go-betweens".

Educational Objective: Participant should be empowered to employ focus group methodology among linguistically marginalized populations.

FL026952

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Focus Groups with Linguistically Marginalized Populations

by Marco M. Pardi

One of the dividends from the evolution of the group therapy technique in psychological practice is the emergence of the focus group as a means of obtaining insights into target audience perceptions and beliefs. First used commercially by market researchers, the focus group method has rapidly gained credibility among health researchers in a variety of fields. However, the transition from a patient-therapist-patient loop to an information based sub-population - researcher - population spiral, particularly in the public arena, has required careful attention to the changes in purpose and method attendant upon the transition. And, the increased use of focus groups by public health researchers has brought to light another area deserving of concern; the heretofore limited application of this method among populations with limited abilities in, or cultural resistance to, conversing in Standard American English (SAE). This paper will address the issues fundamental to the use of the focus group method among such populations.

Definitions:

What a Focus Group is.

A focus group is an assemblage of people which has been convened on the basis of a known common denominator, the link to the study for which the group has been convened. Thus, for example, a study intended to discover attitudes toward the usage of occupational fall safety harnesses would necessitate the convening of a group of people whose occupations, though they

may be varied, share the common denominator of elevated work and subsequent fall risk. It is, of course, possible to narrow the focus to a specific occupation, e.g. linesmen. However, that would necessitate the narrowing of the study and the consequent inability to generalize the findings to other occupations or settings.

A focus group is conducted conversationally; written survey instruments are not used during the course of the group, nor are they normally used solely and specifically with the participants of a group to the exclusion of the larger class of which they are a part. Thus, while all the employees of a large corporation might be asked to respond to a written survey (**quantitative** instrument), small groups of selected employees might also be convened into focus groups (**qualitative** instrument) to provide power and depth to the conclusions drawn from the survey. A focus group is a means of obtaining qualitative data from a sub-set population which can then be shaped into recommendations and justifications for programs, policies, and/or actions applied to the larger population of which it is representative. The participants in focus groups need not be selected in a purely random fashion; focus group findings are not to be represented as statistically significant, nor should the data they yield be analyzed by a method appropriate to quantitative data.

Focus groups may be used a priori to determine the questions and implicit direction of a survey, concurrently to provide depth and power, or subsequently to clarify statistical trends emergent from a quantitative survey. However, in those cases wherein both instruments are used together

careful interpretation of outcomes must include consideration of the potential for cross contamination.

Focus groups also may be used alone. This option is particularly efficacious in applications wherein the members of the informant population are constrained by educational and/or reading ability, unfamiliarity with written instruments, or physical issues such as an adequate setting wherein to complete a written instrument. The psycho-social considerations influencing the decision to use focus groups alone include a preliminary assessment of the informant population for these factors.

This assessment should include an overall profile within which there should be accurate demarcation of subsets. Recruitment of potential focus group participants should, therefore, be directed toward assembling a group which is representative of the total study population, including the relative distribution of the population into those subsets. Internal issues, such as perceived differences in rank, differences in gender, and other potential qualifiers will be more thoroughly discussed later.

Logistical considerations influencing the decision to use focus groups should include: Feasibility of assembling a group at a centrally convenient location, which is acceptable to the potential participants; time (including to and from travel) away from the job or away from the participants' free time; and, remunerative incentives for participation.

Applications:

Special populations.

As the United States becomes more aware of its growing multi-culturalism and its place in the world market the commercial sector is once again leading the way, tailoring products toward targeted populations. On Christmas Eve, some parents are having to hunt further for the English version of the instructions for toy assembly. Yet, while the consideration for other languages is valid in a strict product-purchaser paradigm, more issues arise in conversationally interrogative settings, such as focus groups.

Code Switching.

Within any given language, most speakers adjust their communication style to the form they deem warranted by the context. This phenomenon, known as **code switching**, may be seen in numerous applications, such as the metropolitan office worker who speaks differently "when I'm back home with my kinfolk" in rural Tennessee. While more than mere idiolect, or individual manner of speaking, the "home" code does not always conform to the standards of a true dialect, which is formally taught. Nor can it be described as a jargon, which is normally a subset form of communication using common referents known only within a particular occupation or other such form of association. Yet, the colloquialisms, modes of pronunciation and inflection, and grammatical structures of communal forms of speech are enduring; some more so than others. The "She done me wrong song" has been a signal of a particular solidarity throughout the United States over several decades, while the "that's groovy" of the Hippie generation was actually a fleeting reincarnation from a very different previous life.

The important issue here is that it is the worker/speaker who, without being told, assesses the linguistic context of his social setting and adjusts his speech pattern to fit. Where this occurs, it indicates a willingness to fit in, even if other disparate markers, such as dress, cannot be adjusted. Shortly, we will see that such willingness to fit in, if adopted by a naive focus group moderator, can lead to trouble.

A deeper level of code switching, one at which sub-group sanctioned variations in grammar and syntax occur, can be so predictably systematized as to arouse debate over its possible stature as a true dialect, or even another language. This was exemplified by the Standard American English versus "Black American English" debate as early as the mid-1960's, resurrected in the form of "Ebonics" in the last decade. At issue here is whether the speaker is equally competent in the two speech forms and consciously selects according to perceived social context, or whether the speaker is genuinely competent in only one form, suggesting the reality of a dialect. Competence, here, is the ability to fully understand **and** to fully generate speech in a particular form. Again, we will make the case that full competence on the part of the moderator should not be the determinant for the use of a speech form or a dialect which is not perceived as "natural" to the moderator.

While the issue of code switching within Standard American English has been most visible in the form of "Black American English", its importance is just as high when considering interrogative conversation with other homogenous groups, such as Appalachian coal miners, rural versus urban, traditional "Southern" versus "Northern", and other groups for which adherence to a formulaic speech pattern is a signal of solidarity. The modern criticism that "media-speak" has homogenized the American linguistic landscape not withstanding, distinct variants of Standard American English exist, and are immediate markers of a constellation of intangible traits.

Distinct languages.

While rare, there can be circumstances in which the participants of a focus group are drawn from native speakers of two or more languages. In these cases, a *lingua franca*, or language common to all, must be found. Usually, this will be English; however, the moderator must be selected on the basis of ability to employ the *lingua franca*, and to be flexible in the participants' languages in cases of participant deficiency in the *lingua franca*.

Competence in the application of another language is more than simple translation, more than the mere substitution of morphemes, however grammatically correct that substitution may be. Competence in another language is also, to a great degree, competence in the culture for which that language is the medium. Thus, a truly competent speaker will know that, while a particular linguistic construction is grammatically possible, it is not culturally probable. This distinguishes the "classroom speaker" from the native speaker. However, the role of the moderator primarily

as a professional who goes from one kind of group to another mitigates to some degree the application of standards to which the participants would ordinarily hold each other. The participants will not expect a professional moderator to be natively competent in each of the linguistic and cultural settings he or she visits.

Most distinct languages have regional and/or socio-economic strata variants, sometimes formalized to the point of being true dialects. For example, the typical American high school student learning Spanish learns Academy, or "Castilian", Spanish, appropriate to the formally educated native speakers in Spain. Employment of this language form in southern Mexico, or highland Peru immediately marks the speaker as an outsider, and may even result in significant misunderstandings. Among many examples, Academy would say, "Echarse un trago", while in Mexico it is "echarse un fogonazo", in Chile it is "empinar el cacho", and in Colombia it is "pegarse un palo". All this "to take a drink".

Clearly, then, a focus group moderator conducting a group, in Spanish, with "Hispanics" working in the poultry industry in North Georgia must be prepared to repeat, rephrase, and even to wait as one or more participants who understand his/her utterance translate for those who do not. Many, if not most native English speakers in the United States still view resident "Hispanics" as a homogenous entity, uniformly speaking "Spanish". Yet, a skillful moderator will turn this linguistic melange to advantage, enlisting the aid of an assistant moderator from the study population, or simply "loosening up" the focus group by working with the participants to correct

his or her own linguistic mistakes. Marginalized people, particularly those who find themselves in unfavorable socio-economic strata by comparison to their culture of origin or to the "mainstream" of the culture they are now in, often welcome the chance to help and to educate the moderator, whom they see as a success symbol from the dominant sector. And, more importantly, even linguistic sub-groups of Standard American English, such as those cited earlier, will see through a moderator's attempt to adopt a speech pattern which is not natural to him, viewing this attempt as shallow and patronizing.

Methodology:

Planning.

Before any other steps may be taken toward the use of focus groups there must be agreement among the researchers upon the following: (1) The cognitive domains within which the group(s) will be asked to function; (2) The purpose for asking the group(s) to function within that/those domain(s); and, (3) The relative weight of the group(s) outcome among other final determinants of policy.

Exact identification of the issues to be explored with prospective focus groups will help determine the identity of the agency which will be asked to do the recruiting and screening of potential participants. The researchers must identify a recruitment/screening agency which is viewed positively, or at least neutrally, by potential participants. Thus, for example, the County Health Department might, in some minds, be viewed as "government", or regulatory, whereas a Community Center or church association might have an outstanding presence and credibility among the target population.

Logistics.

Once planning has been completed, implementation may begin. This includes several steps, each of which has options. Most major cosmopolitan areas have companies which specialize in focus group based research, some operating in several localities. However, for the purposes of researching very specific issues, most of these companies have limited relevance. Typically these companies maintain a relatively stable pool of generalized potential participants who have identified themselves to the company to be payed when used for various marketing studies which may arise. These participants pools are queried on an as needed basis for characteristics or product usages which might be found broadly in the general population. The more specific the study, the less likely a research company would be able to assemble an appropriate group. Of course, marketing research companies specializing in linguistically marginalized populations are rare to non-existent, and members of these populations are not likely to volunteer themselves to mainstream companies.

Companies often do, however, have specially designed rooms which include ceiling microphones, a concealed tape recorder, and one way glass behind which researchers may sit and note the body language of the participants and videotape the sessions.

While these options are attractive for many groups, they in some cases may present more problems than they solve. The company, and its room, may be situated in an area of the city which is unfamiliar to the participants, especially if those participants are drawn from

linguistically marginalized groups. The setting may be so high-tech and impressive as to be distracting or intimidating. And, no one is fooled by one way glass.

The preferable option when working with marginalized groups is to identify an association or agency to which the target population belongs, or from which the target population derives services. This association or agency may have a central registry of member individuals or those being served by the agency and will be able to accomplish most or all of the prescreening of participants based upon criteria provided by the researchers. The association or agency will likely also have a meeting room with which the target population is familiar. Where meeting rooms are not available on site, the association or agency should be able to identify a hotel meeting room which is acceptable to the target population. In any event, the room should be comfortable and easily accessible, but private.

The use of audio and/or video equipment in a room should not be considered inhibitory, especially if handled by persons readily familiar with its operation. A skillful moderator will easily focus the attention of the group onto the subject within the first few minutes. In fact, the actual manipulation of the equipment may well be a task for an assistant moderator in the room, thereby diminishing his/her visibility as one who is noting body language and other less tangible features of the focus group interaction. The assistant moderator may also be a member of the marginalized group being studied, and may be able to assist the moderator in linguistic nuances when needed.

Recruitment.

The Planning stage of the project should have precisely identified the issues about which the group participants will be queried. Thus, a set of research questions submitted to a Boolean analysis should have produced a distribution of characteristics against which the universe of potential participants may be matched. The recruiting official may then apply these characteristics categorically to the universal population, in a sort of triage, to derive a core category from which he will solicit focus group participants by direct contact. It is at this point that the research agency usually finds itself in need of liaison with an organization or agency through which to identify actual people in the approved category.

Once having moved to the direct contact stage, the researchers must determine whether their agency profile is amenable to direct contact with potential participants. Contact through an intermediary which is related to the group is generally preferable to phone calls from people who identify themselves as connected with government or research agencies. And, the use of a telephone recruiter who is from the same group as the target population is helpful, especially in the case of a distinct language difference. From this point it is only a matter of making clear to the intermediary the characteristics being sought, the number of participants, the time and place of the meeting, and the remuneration, if any, to be employed.

Some of the characteristics identified in the Planning stage will indicate time parameters appropriate to the participants of the focus groups. For example, active workers may feel more

available in early morning or evening hours, whereas retired workers may be optimally available in mid-morning. Convening a group of retirees near the hours of darkness imposes a qualifier as those who are unwilling to drive under such circumstances will opt not to participate.

Another factor in the timing of groups is cross-contamination between or among groups. Two issues arise here. First, group participants should not know the specific subject to be discussed in advance. Knowing too much of the subject prevents the spontaneity which is a prime justification for the use of the group. Of far greater consequence is the actual transmission of the questions from one group to another. While the point here is not to "test" the responses of the group in a right or wrong sense, it is to elicit unrehearsed and uncoached answers. Transmission of information from one group to a later group is invariably accompanied by interpretation of that information and the infusion of the "could'a, would'a, should'a" thinking which often occurs after a group has concluded.

No matter how strictly a moderator may adhere to a standardized discussion guide, each group evolves a character of its own. The infusion by participants of answers or comments which are based on recollected impressions of what might have been, or should have been said in a previous group can thoroughly distort the natural proceedings of the subsequent group.

Industrial focus group literature has included concern over the possibility that a particular group may include supervisors and the employees whom they directly supervise, or employees and persons the employees perceive to be in positions of power or influence (Krueger, 1994). This

concern is well founded. Such perceived imbalances lead to deferential behavior, inhibition of candor, and, ultimately, resentment by the lower ranked employees toward the moderator, who may be perceived as the proximate cause of their discomfort.

This issue is also powerful when assembling a focus group from a culture based population whose hierarchies may be imperceptible to the untrained eye. If a population can be described as linguistically marginalized by virtue of Standard American English being a second language, there must be a presumption that other cultural themes are also at work. A common theme, found within many such populations, is deference based on age. Other qualifiers may include gender, number of children, level of education, number of years of sobriety, or even injuries sustained on the job or in some endeavor perceived as for the good of the group. The important point here is that significant linguistic differences should signal the need to look more closely at the population before attempting to assemble a representative group.

Ideally, group composition would not yield a hierarchical characterization. However, it is possible in some cases to compose a stratified group which includes members who are not in any authoritative relationship to one another. The introductory reassurances of the informed moderator should mitigate some of these concerns.

The issue of hierarchy raised above revisits the comment made earlier, in **Definitions**, that groups need not be assembled in a purely random fashion. Again, focus groups are not intended

13.

to portray a statistical representation of the universal population of a particular occupation. Nonetheless, they must remain as free as possible from biased loading. Thus, while definitively categorical selection is a necessary artifact of protocols which determine most group designs, personal selection based on the presumption of differentially greater value is never acceptable. The pool of candidates from each category is established first by category, then by discovery of the persons within that category. The recruiting official may then approach each candidate on a personal level, encouraging participation through the assertion that the individual's contribution would be of significance. This assertion, however, must be equally applied throughout the recruitment process.

The recruitment process, then, is manifestly not purely random. It is driven by the issues to be investigated and by the determination of the categories of people best suited to address those issues. Subsequent extrapolation from the groups to the universal population must therefore be framed as inferential, not deterministic. Ideally, other forms of evidence support the inferences drawn from the focus groups.

The final numbers for group composition may range from six to fourteen. Below six the group tends toward Key Informant status, albeit more than one. The inferences thus possible from such an event become far more diluted, particularly as focus group discussion guides are not usually designed for the in depth kind of probing appropriate to Key Informants. Fourteen is an unusual outer limit. The dangers inherent in allowing a group to reach this size include: (1) Less vocal

individuals, who may in fact have valuable contributions, tend to drift into obscurity; (2) attention spans of individual members may decline; and (3) side conversations may develop as the moderator appears embedded within some other part of the group. Optimal group size ranges from eight to twelve.

Process.

There are several issues of importance when implementing the focus group method with linguistically marginalized groups. Concealment of the identity of the sponsoring agency is not permissible. The moderator, however, must be particularly careful to effect disclosure in a way which precludes any perceived threat or condescension, and which encourages the participants to internalize a sense of self worth which validates their selection for participation. At least some of this self worth will derive from the belief that improvements will flow from the efforts the participants invest in the process. Linguistically marginalized groups, whether they are indigenous to the United States or immigrants, often perceive themselves in a lesser relationship to the mainstream "establishment". This perception easily develops into a suspicion that they are being used, whether for political gain or even for the individual academic advancement of some university graduate student "doing a study". As the only point of contact between the agency sponsoring the research and the participants themselves, the moderator should do what he/she can beforehand to ascertain the purposes, the importance, and the possible outcomes flowing from the study so as to be able to address these questions after the session, if

needed; simply leaving at the conclusion of the session may generate a chilling ripple effect which reinforces the worst presumptions of the population at large.

Selection of a Moderator.

Much of the literature on focus groups, and the "common wisdom" employed by research agencies, suggests that moderators should be selected on the basis of their resemblance to, or affinity with the study population. At best, this position overlooks fundamental group dynamics; at worst, it sets in motion certain reinforcers of preexisting beliefs in a condescending attitude held by the research agency. In a recent round of focus groups with Native American Tribal Elders and health care workers throughout the Western and Central United States the participants responded to the moderator's inquiry into their needs by saying, "Send us a cultural anthropologist. It doesn't matter if he or she is Black, White, Latino, or Indian. We need someone who is professionally trained in how to investigate and to understand issues in their cultural context." The same holds true for focus group moderators, who are more than mere proxy interrogators. The moderator is a professional who has the flexibility to deal with any group with which he or she is linguistically competent, and the ability to understand how and when to use that flexibility. Simple superficial demographics do not guarantee those capacities.

If the moderator is from the same agency as the research group conducting the study he/she must self identify as such but must clearly and unequivocally establish distance from the design and

the outcome of the study. Furthermore, the moderator must recognize and accept certain realities of group dynamics. Even when a moderator is specifically chosen for perceived affinities with the focus group population, it is undeniably true that the group will ascribe to him/her certain differential characteristics. Among other varied characterizations, he/she will be defined as a professional. And, in forming this definition, the group will continuously analyze the moderator's deportment for either affirmation or contradiction of their characterization.

Part of the desire to select a moderator who conforms to the preconceived characteristics of the study population may stem from an unrealized elitism on the part of the researchers. The presumption that a group of native SAE speakers that employs seriously ungrammatical and/or regionally accented speech does so from inability to know and use "proper" SAE is spurious; especially since the advent of the Mid-Western American English radio and television media. As stated earlier, the adoption and use of a particular speech form is a means of self-alignment and declaration of solidarity. The employment of that speech form by the moderator, although possibly genuine, may contrast so greatly with the moderator persona created in the minds of the group members that they suspect either that the moderator is not truly professional or that he is engaging in a shallow condescension.

What is true for language is also true for dress. No matter what the makeup of the group may be, the moderator is, vis a vis the group, in the role of a professional executing professional duties. Attempts to presume the dress of the group, and to dress one's self accordingly, may have

embarrassing consequences, and will certainly detract from the professional demeanor the group is expecting to see.

Analysis.

Professional settings for focus groups usually include an adjoining room, connected by one way glass, through which observers may view and videotape the proceedings. The fundamental presumption here is that non-verbal behavior is satisfactorily interpretable. However, this presumption must not go unchallenged, particularly in the case of probable cultural differences. While early researchers (Edward Hall, The Silent Language; Konrad Lorenz, On Aggression; Desmond Morris, The Naked Ape) established the importance of non-verbal communication as an artifact of the communication process within and even between species, there is yet to emerge from the subsequent plethora of ambiguous, conflicting and contradictory schemata anything which ascends clearly and unambiguously above the level of "common wisdom" when Man is in question. Consultants abound in fields as diverse as jury selection and dating services, and their credibility often rests merely upon their clients' ignorance of other consultants, hence other options.

Undeniably, there are acceptable parameters of non-verbal communication which contribute to the interpretation of the transcribed spoken word. Most often, the definitive statements about any given participant's non-verbal communication are based upon deviation from an established

baseline. And, it is here that the analyst must admit that the baseline may only be established within the context of the behavior exhibited for the duration of the group session. The analyst has no other baseline against which to measure the non-verbal behavior of any given participant. Thus, a participant whose behavior chronometrically charts as mostly taciturn, might be specially noted if he responds to a particular question with an anxiety to interject which compels him to interrupt the speech of another. Again, while the observer may note this occurrence as significant, that participant's colleagues may later wonder, "What came over Joe? He only interrupted once!"

Conclusions drawn from non-verbal behavior, then, are more safely based on the behavior of the group rather than the individual. Variables such as volume, frequency of interruption, open disagreement, or non-responsiveness are appropriate for consideration retrospectively, after the particular group has had a full session within which to portray a baseline. And, other confounders such as time of day must be considered in the interpretation of a limited display of group behavior. In sum, generalized conclusions which scrupulously forswear the quantification of individual mannerisms are permissible when supported by the transcribed text of the speech event within the focus group session.

Krueger described the analysis process by saying, "No part of the focus group interview is as ill-structured as analysis. Analysis is based on a number of assumptions, which exert considerable influence on the process of analysis." (Krueger, 1994)

As implied in the discussion of "body language", micro-analysis, usually derived from a failure to distinguish quantitative from qualitative methods, can be impractical at best, and ultimately misleading and confusing. That analysis must be systematic cannot be argued. However, there are pragmatic steps to achieve an elegant and useful result.

1. The tape recordings of the focus group session should be transcribed. It is also possible that each line may be numbered. Once in possession of the transcription, the analyst(s) should read it in its entirety.

2. During the second reading certain themes will emerge. These may be categorized and the categories coded. The codes may then be entered in the margins where appropriate. This process, called **axial coding**, enables the researcher(s) to document the basis for their interpretation of the data. It also enables recombination where necessary. However, where more than one researcher is conducting analysis, axial coding depends upon consensus on the criteria for the categories. Consensual axial coding mitigates the selective perceptions possible from any one analyst and yields veracity, the absence of which is so often the Achilles' Heel of qualitative research.

Note: Some researchers (Krueger; Guba and Lincoln) advocate immediate "debriefing" between the Moderator and the Assistant Moderator at the conclusion of each group. Two factors mitigate against this approach. First, various reasons may dictate that there simply is no Assistant Moderator. Secondly, mixing impressions which are themselves built upon

remembered perceptions introduces a possible confounder into the eventual process wherein the Moderator, and possibly the Assistant Moderator when present, addresses the actual transcripts coming from the session. Anxiety to conform to what initially seems to be the perception of the other analyst may taint each of the analysts' approach to the transcripts, particularly when there is a disparity between the Moderators regarding their connection to the project and knowledge of the subject matter. A Moderator whose "Assistant Moderator" is actually a member of the group sponsoring the focus group events may defer in judgement to the Assistant by virtue of his perceived expertise in the subject matter or his perceived categorical knowledge of the focus group participants. Carried even further, subsequent focus groups involving these two Moderators may find the Principal Moderator glancing at the Assistant for cues during the course of the group session, an event which is sure to be interpreted in some fashion by the participants. In short, unless some significant change in protocol is indicated by the performance of a group, analysis is better served by constraining impressions to the autonomous event of addressing the transcripts and then presenting one's conclusions and defenses before other analysts who have examined the same transcripts and have devised their own analyses. Again, being a Qualitative event, a focus group conversation must be accepted as a time specific approximation of the feelings held by the participants.

3. Upon completion of the presentation by the analyst(s) the results should be ready for incorporation into an Outcome Document. This document provides interpretations and

recommendations appropriate to the design of a subsequent course of action. Completion and presentation of the Outcome Document concludes the focus group contribution to the study of which it was a part. However, the Moderator should remain available to program officials for further clarification, if needed. Presentation to other programs or agencies concerned with similar groups should always be prefaced with the caveat that the findings portrayed in the Outcome Document are intrinsically limited in scope, and generalization should be considered cautiously.

Conclusion:

The use of focus group methodology with linguistically marginalized populations is appropriate, yet under utilized. Indeed, considering the factors, such as literacy, felt perceptions of research agencies, difficulties in administration of written surveys, and others discussed above, it is preferable. The logistics of focus group events are more readily solved than are those of survey distribution. The contemporaneous interaction among the respondents is more productive of veracity than is the autonomous completion of a questionnaire. And, the analysis of the group session is more likely to elucidate issues and feelings, for which there would have been little or no venue in preformed questionnaires.

Focus groups, as qualitative events, should never be considered as the statistical "proof" or "disproof" of a hypothesis. However, they do provide invaluable working insights into the ethos underlying a selected population's choices in the area of study.

References:

1. U.S.Dept.HHS,PHS,NIH Publication No. 92-1493 April 1992.
2. Glaser, Barney G & Strauss, Anselm L. (1967) *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research.* Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.
3. Krueger, Richard A. Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research. Sage Publications. Thousand Oaks, Ca. 1994.
4. Kirby, Susan D. & Rheaume, Carol *Focus Group Research: Conceptual Development and Moderation Skills.* Formative Research Consultants, Inc. Atlanta, Ga. 1995.
5. Pardi, Marco M. *Core Values.* CDC Monograph 1998.

Author:

Marco M. Pardi, a Research Psychologist with the Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, holds undergraduate and graduate degrees and certifications from the University of South Florida, Washington University - St. Louis, CDC Corporate University, and the George Washington University - D.C. He has extensive academic and field work experience on three continents in 10 languages, including 14 dialects.